UNLA – Questions and Answers

Q: What is a reasonable compromise that Israel could offer that would help to secure peace in the Middle East?

A: I used to deal with it more intensively as a prime minister some 15 years ago, and at the time I said that even if it takes 5, 15, or 50 years, you will need a magnifying glass to see the differences between what was put by myself and President Clinton on the table in 2000 and the way that a final understanding will look like. The only tragedy is that many lives and many opportunities and a lot of wealth will be lost along the way. I think that basically Israel cares about their security, and the Palestinians about something more abstract that they think as their rights, but also their national aspirations. I think that basically the elements are known. Because security is important, we have to delineate a line, within the land of Israel, that will include the main settlement blocks and all the Israeli suburbs beyond the 67 line in Jerusalem, and a military Israeli presence along the River Jordan. These lines can be a base for agreement, and the Palestinians of course demand that they will be compensated by areas with a similar size. I think that a special arrangement should be done in regards to "the holy basin", as we call it, in Jerusalem, which include the Temple Mountain and what the Arabs call Haram al-Sharif, and the city of David, the old Jewish cemetery on Mount Olives. We will have to have a set of coordination and arrangements, security arrangements, in regards to many aspects, we'll have to have understandings, basically we cannot accept the right of return of Palestinians into Israel, but whatever had been approve or could been approved, if it's summarized in an agreement as "end of conflict", namely that whatever had been agreed upon will become the end of conflict and finality of all mutual claims, that's much stronger, legally speaking, from a judicial point of view, than any kind symbolic statement by either side.

I think that it won't be easy. I know for sure that Arafat was not right for it. I cannot tell you for sure whether Abu Mazen will be ready, but we won't know unless we try. And because the Israelis want to be, kind of, not to find themselves manipulated, which already happened in the past and could happen, we'd better do it within a wider agreement with the

whole region, that will put recognition of Israel by the whole of the Arab moderate world, opening the borders, opening embassies, normalizing the relationship.

Some people ask me, but what happens if the Palestinians will not accept it? So first of all, if they will not accept it, we might be able to do it unilaterally, or at least most of it, clearly the line, and somehow push the whole thing towards the point of no return, towards a two-state solution. Because the real risk for Israel is the alternative, namely to find ourselves on a slippery slope towards a one-state solution, where, as I mentioned, it will become inevitably either non-Jewish or non-democratic. And I keep telling some friends in high levels in Israel that recently I start to wonder whether it's so important for us that the Palestinians will be full heartedly for it. Probably more and more Palestinians start to think that if a one-state solution, namely one state where the majority rules, if it's so bad for Israel, probably it's not so bad for them. So when you think about this slowly, there is a much more subtle and complicate interest underneath the surface, and we in Israel, we are somehow caught in this kind of discourse that says: but what else can we do? What else can we do? Rabin and Peres gave them, Barak gave them, Olmert game them, Bibi tried to give them and they are never satisfied. But when you bring into mind that for 47 years we are reigning over another people against their wishes, you understand that whatever we tell each other is part of a story, and the whole story is much more complicated. And I say it especially, looking at the other side of what I mentioned earlier, Israel is the strongest country in the whole region. So we have nothing to fear but fear itself, as FDR said on other issues. We should not negotiate out of fear, but we should not fear to negotiate, as Obama recently quoted Kennedy. Israel is clearly, and I keep telling our public, wake up! Israel is not in 1938 in Europe and we're not in 1948 in Palestine. We are the strongest country, it's 2015, and we can and should be self-confident enough and feel strong enough to contemplate what concretely could be done. And we won't know until we check it.

And last remark, about political negotiation in modern time. Nowadays, it's not easy for political leaders to negotiate. With the penetrating media the moment you start to negotiate, and negotiating, it's a give and take,

you have to put hypothetical proposals of concession on the table, in order to negotiate. But if the media reports it immediately, you lose the support of your power base in politics, long before you have an agreement or even know whether you will have an agreement. So no politician in his full senses is ready to enter into it. So there is a need to create certain mechanics where the real negotiation goes on far from the public eye, in a way that could be denied by both sides, much ahead of the public's awareness of the details. At least in our case, that's the only way to reach results. Both Sadat and Begin in 78, Rabin and King Hussein in 94, and even Oslo, whatever has been achieved started far from the public's eye in the woods of Scandinavia.

Q: Do you feel it was appropriate for the current prime minister of Israel to influence the US congress on Iran, especially when negotiations were ongoing?

A: I know of the debate here… Basically, on a very profound level, it's extremely justifiable that an Israeli prime minister, when it comes to issues that he perceives as critical for our future and security, to do whatever he can to convince. So the question is not about the principle but about the details of the execution. Several of us in Israel and several American friends suggested a different approach, that instead of going into a clash about this issue, probably the right way to do the same thing basically, was somewhat different, to coordinate with the administration, just out of respect to the will of the American people, the same way that we expect the American people to respect our political democratically reached results, but to make the big speech on AIPAC gathering – some of you probably know AIPAC, the organization that brings 15,000 people under the same roof, 70% of congressmen, 70% of senators, probably more, are present there – they can hear all the messages, and the other day, to go to the hill and both on the house and on the senate, sit down behind closed doors with the leading committees, armed services, intelligence, appropriation, probably another one, and brief personally the members of the congress from both sides of the political aisle. Over there, it's closed doors, you can expose much more convincing data and information, and try to deal with individual senators or congressmen who are against it. Some of us thought that that's a better strategy. But

basically, to repeat it, I think, I cannot judge but support an Israeli prime minister who does whatever it takes to carry the message of something which is extremely important for him, and duly so.

Q: Do you agree with prime minster Netanyahu that Iran cannot be trusted with nuclear weapons, because of their belief in "glorious death", or words to that effect?

A: I would not trust them anyhow. I always quote a British diplomat who spent his career, basically, in Iran, and he told the following in his memoirs, that Iran is a place and a culture where they do not say what they think and do not do what they say, and no one feels a drop of cognitive dissonance. If it serves them, it's okay. So you cannot really trust them, they will say whatever it takes to convince you at the present, then do whatever they think really serves them. So I would not trust them. Having said so, I don't think that it's, we are not the only reason why they try to reach nuclear capability. They see themselves as a major power from the dawn of history, they look around, they see everyone around is nuclear, Pakistan is nuclear, India is nuclear, China is nuclear, Russia is nuclear, Iraq tried to be nuclear, Syria tried to be nuclear, Israel is allegedly nuclear. Look around, and only the Iranians are not. I don't believe that the moment they have a bomb – if they have, I hope we'll be clever enough to not to let them ever reach there – they're not going to immediately drop it, they are clever enough to understand it might end up back in the stone age. They are not that stupid, but there is a grain of truth in this quotation from Netanyahu, I've never heard him saying that, but he probably said. The truth is that, as the great academic scholar of the Middle East, Bernard Lewis, he's now over 90, he told something about this regime, he said, this is regime that doesn't see apocalypse in the same way that we look it. For them, and you can think about extreme situations, it's not something for daily situations but an extreme situation, if they are there, in their bunkers and everything is collapsing upon their heads, their history, their legacy, and whatever, someone once asked me, what do you think Hitler would have done if when the Red Army crossed the border into German territory, he had several crude nuclear devices, would he have used them or not? And my answer is, probably he would use them, doesn't seem so impossible. So this kind of regime is very

extreme, under normal situations, and extremely sophisticated. Extremely sophisticated. I read into their, I've watched them for many years. You cannot underestimate the shrewdness and sophistication of this people. But having said that, they are still so extreme in their religious beliefs, that under certain situations, it could end up, when it seems to them that the apocalypse is coming, for any other human being it would cause a kind of paralysis, for them it might be, in a way, religiously welcome.

So I would say that– as of now we are not under existential threat from Iran, they don't have yet a nuclear weapon. But if Iran turns nuclear, as I described it, it will be a loss of any control, and the quite disturbing vision of Prof. Graham Allison of Harvard, who wrote a book several years ago about nuclear terrorism, which predicted that if we cannot control the holding of nuclear weapons to the club of 6 or 7 major nations, we will end up, sooner or later, probably in 15 years or so, with certain crude nuclear devices in the hands of terrorists. And they might not hesitate for a moment to send it to Rotterdam, to Manhattan, or to Ashdod. In a container, even, if it's very crude. So we should be worried, and Iran turning nuclear creates a potential of existential threat for the state of Israel, that's why we're so deeply worried about it.

Q: Given recent Israeli election results, what do most Israeli Jews feel about the prospect for peace, the so-called person on the street?

A: A person of the street is extremely suspicious, and the lost trust, there is not a drop of trust remained between the Israeli public and many Palestinians, and between the leaderships as well. But I think that's where leadership has to stand, beyond what the people see. And it's possible, I know for sure, I remember a historic example. When president Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Begin negotiated peace. It was a year after the historic visit of Sadat to the Knesset. A year later. After, apparently all the psychological barriers about possible breakthroughs with the Egyptians were behind us. He visited the Knesset! When Menachem Begin took off to Camp David, to the summit that ended with the Camp David agreement, with peace with Egypt, three weeks before that, the polling in Israel showed clearly that two thirds of the Israeli public, the person in the street, as you say, are totally against any agreement. He

came with no agreement, he came with a document signed with initials, and he brought it to the Knesset. Three weeks after he came from Camp David, two thirds of the people, the person on the street, were for agreement. So, if anyone wants to have deeper thoughts on the political behavior of the masses, I would recommend to read either Maimonides or Spinoza, they all kind of express their view about it.

We are a worried people, for good reasons, if you take into account out history, even in the last century, but as I mentioned earlier, we are strong and we shouldn't be afraid of anything but our own nature to porcupine sometimes. We shouldn't let ourselves be over-pessimist and over-passive, clearly not over-anxious. All Zionism was about taking out fate in our hands and start to do something, not just to pray or wait for heaven to intervene. And we have to follow this great tradition.

Thank you.